BLIND SPOT

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independent media centre

Helmut Braun's life of activism

Eleanor Grant

Local activists were saddened and shocked recently by the sudden death of Helmut Braun, on September 24 at the age of 43.

For the 20 years that Helmut lived in K-W, he passionately supported causes of peace and justice. In the early 1980's, he supported the peace initiatives of his fellow Mennonites at Conrad Grebel College and the Olive Branch congregation. He was also very active in Ebytown food co-op in the mid-80's.

When he heard that the old YMCA building at Queen and Weber Streets was going to be torn down, he organized the roomers living there along with local activists to protest. The campaign was eventually unsuccessful, as the developer demolished the building, only to leave the site vacant for a long time afterward.

A bursary is being established in Helmut's memory. For info, please see **http://www.crehs.on.ca**

In the late 80's, Helmut became involved with the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) and the literature of its founder Hardial Bains. He would later run in 2 elections under their banner. He took part in a protest in Ottawa against a visit by President Reagan, and was arrested and jailed for occupying the Dept. of Defence. The experience was so terrifying for him that he always rushed to help others who got in trouble with the law for their activism.

When the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord was called, Helmut actively supported the campaign to vote 'No.'

He always faithfully supported the good initiatives of others, from the protests against the massacre in Hebron of Muslims at prayer, to the Days of Action against the Harris Tories, to the picket against the Princess Cinema when it locked out its unionized projectionists, to vigils against the sanctions and bombing of Iraq.

He was a founding member of the People's Car Co-op. He also actively campaigned for a youth-run drop-in centre in downtown Kitchener, and when The Spot finally opened this year, he gave from his meagre resources to support it. He took part in daily protests against the bombing of Yugoslavia, and you can be sure he'd be out there now to protest the attack against Afghanistan.

Inwardly, Helmut fought a recurring battle with schizophrenia, the disease that finally claimed his life through suicide. In the last year of his life, he devoted all his energy to advocating for the rights of psychiatric patients, especially the campaign against Community Treatment Orders with their increased police powers.

Helmut Braun, 1958 - 2001 : Rest In Peace

As Anna di Carlo from the CPC(ML) pointed out at his memorial service, Helmut became himself a victim of the inadequate health care system he had campaigned against. His death occurred only two weeks after his discharge from Grand River Hospital, and his survivors are asking for an investigation into the many recent suicides of newly discharged psych patients.

Helmut's sincerity and courage will not be soon forgotten.

October 16 protests mark end of Harris' reign

Doug Tanner

October 16, in the heart of downtown Toronto, was the second time I have witnessed people participating in a large-scale non-hierarchical, cooperative organization. When 2,500 people converged on Nathan Phillips Square, at the crazy hour of 5:00 a.m., no leader had issued an order to assemble. Almost every facet of this huge mobilization, from planning to execution, took place almost completely outside the capitalist and corporate system, and was organized entirely nonhierarchically.

The main catalyst for this event, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), operates on a shoestring budget — the cost of organizing the fall campaign was estimated at around $20,000. The money came from individuals and from organizations like unions and NGO's.

Transportation and housing were arranged on a pay-what-you-can basis, or simply offered for free. This decentralized,

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Sunera Thobani: "War frenzy"

Sunera Thobani made a very passionate speech a few weeks back, saying that American foreign policy is "Soaked in blood," among other things.

For that she has been slandered at every turn. This is a much-abbreviated version of her response, "War frenzy."

The complete response is available at ontario.indymedia.org article # 2763; her original speech is at article # 2016. The complete response has also been made into a printer-friendly, 4-page .pdf file, available at print.indymedia.org

WAR FRENZY

Sunera Thobani

My recent speech at a woman's conference on violence against women has generated much controversy. Decontextualized and distorted media reports of my address have led to accusations of me being an academic impostor, morally bankrupt and engaging in hate-mongering. I was even made the subject of a 'hate-crime' complaint to the RCMP.

Despite the virulence of these responses, I welcome the public discussion my speech has generated as an opportunity to further the public debate about Canada's support of "America's new war."

ON AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

In the aftermath of the terrible September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, the Bush administration launched "America's War on Terrorism." One of its early coalition partners was the Canadian government which committed its unequivocal support for whatever forms of assistance the United States might request. In this circumstance, it is entirely reasonable that people in Canada examine carefully the record of American foreign policy.

As I observed in my speech, this record is alarming and does not inspire confidence. In Chile, the CIA-backed coup against the democratically elected Allende government led to the deaths of more than 30,000 people. In El Salvador, the U.S. backed regime used death squads to kill about 75,000 people. In Nicaragua, the U.S.-SPONSORED terrorist contra war led to the deaths of more than 30,000 people. The initial bombing of Iraq left more than 200,000 dead, and the bombings have continued for the last ten years.

UNICEF estimates that more than one million Iraqis have died, and that 5,000 more die every month as a result of the U.N. imposed sanctions, enforced in their harshest form by U.S. power.

The list does not stop here. 150,000 were killed and 50,000 disappeared in Guatemala after the 1954 CIA-sponsored coup; more than 2 million were killed in Vietnam; and 200,000 before that in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear attacks. Numerous authoritarian regimes have been backed by the United States including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the apartheid regime in South Africa, Suharto's dictatorship in Indonesia, Marcos in the Philippines, and Israel's various occupations of Lebanon, the Golan Heights and the Palestinian territories.

The U.S. pattern of foreign intervention has been to overthrow leftist governments and to impose right wing regimes which in turn support U.S. interests, even if this means training and using death squads and assassinating leftist politicians and activists. To this end, it has a record of treating civilians as entirely expendable.

It is in this context that I made my comment that the United States is the largest and most dangerous global force, unleashing horrific levels of violence around the world, and that the path of U.S. foreign policy is soaked in blood. The controversy generated by this comment has surprisingly not addressed the veracity of this assessment of the U.S. record. Instead, it has focused on my tone and choice of words (inflammatory, excessive, inelegant, un-academic, angry, etc.).

THE POLITICS OF LIBERATING WOMEN

I have been taken to task for stating that there will be no emancipation for women anywhere until western domination of the planet is ended.

When Afghan women's groups were calling attention to this U.S. support as a major factor in the Taliban regime's coming to power, we did not heed them. We did not recognize that Afghan women's groups were in the front line resisting the Taliban and its Islamist predecessors, including the present militias of the Northern Alliance.

Instead, we chose to see them only as 'victims' of 'Islamic culture,' to be pitied and 'saved' by the West. Time and time again, third world feminists have pointed out to us the pitfalls of rendering invisible the agency and resistance of women of the South, and of reducing women's oppression to various third world 'cultures.' Many continue to ignore these insights.

Now, the U.S. administration has thrown its support behind the Northern Alliance, even as Afghan women's groups oppose the U.S. military attacks on Afghanistan, and raise serious concerns about the record of the

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OUR PAPER

Blind Spot is the print project of the Kitchener-Waterloo Independent Media Centre (IMC). It is currently published on a (bi?)monthly basis. Initial funds for printing have been provided by Waterloo Public Interest Research Group (WPIRG). We are always looking for feedback and people looking to get involved. Contact us by phone at **(519) 244-1140** or email: **imc-waterloo-print@indymedia.org.** Our current printing costs are approximately $0.25 a paper; if you would like to help support us financially, we encourage you to cover the costs of one year's printing (10 issues) for **2 papers — $5; for 4 papers — $10; for 8 papers — $20; for 20 papers — $50; or for 40 papers —$100.**

OUR BIAS

The corporate media aren't honest about their biases. They try to pass off their news and reporting as "objective," even though the interests of the owners and advertisers, as well as the personal biases of the reporters and editors shape every word. At the Independent Media Centres, we encourage ordinary people to become the media, and give voice to the concerns of the environmental and social justice movements. We will try to reflect discussions and debates happening within these movements, but with our limited space, we can't cover all perspectives. For the corporate perspective, refer to the corporate media. Anyone can publish articles and comments to our websites:

ontario.indymedia.org and **www.indymedia.org**

WLU Amnesty International protests war

Doug Tanner

Amnesty International (at Wilfrid Laurier University), whose members apparently don't require sleep, organized a demonstration early on a Thursday morning at the insane hour of 7:00 a.m.

We gathered at a Tim Horton's near the University, so the coffee addicts could get their fix, then loudly marched toward King and University, the busiest intersection in the area. The constant traffic and buses arriving from all directions made it an ideal protest spot.

We remained there, chanting and making speeches, for about an hour. It was overcast most of the time, but only started raining near the end.

What surprised me about the rally was not the gestures of support (people honking their horns and yelling out of bus windows), but the complete LACK of criticism. Not once did we hear any catcalls or boos or recriminations! Even fairly benign protests usually have their share of detractors. This time around, I expected to be at least yelled at and called a terrorist and maybe worse. It really makes you wonder if there really is any support in Canada for this illegal war.

And illegal it is. One of the speeches made today quoted Law Professor Michael Mandel, who reminds us that the attack "violates international law and the express words of the United Nations Charter". His article also goes on to say that "since the United States and Britain have undertaken this attack without the explicit authorization of the Security Council, those who die from it will be victims of a crime against humanity".

Because it was organized by Amnesty International, this protest cannot explicitly call for peace. However, illegal war on an impoverished nation massively violates human rights. Eight million Afghans out of a population of 20 million are on the verge of starvation. 37 000 daily rations dropped on one day only, does not even pretend to address this problem. Because of the war, aid cannot reach anyone inside the country, and because of the illegal border closing by Pakistan, no one can escape.

After the chants and speeches at the intersection, we made our way over to Wilfrid Laurier University, where we paraded around inside the concourse, and outside the residences. Here two teachers joined us. We finally ended the rally at a table set up with a petition to end the war. A microphone and speaker continued to draw people over to the table throughout the day.

Arabs banned from chemistry courses

Kevin Smith

Canada is banning some Arab students from taking university chemistry courses. Authorities fear foreign students from countries including Iraq, Iran, and Libya will use the knowledge they gain for bomb-making and terrorism.

The Canadian Federation of Students has branded the policy racist. No foreign students will get visas to study chemistry or biology if they are from a country on Canada's terrorism watch list of rogue nations.

"Clearly, this is a policy that unfairly treats all Arabs as potential terrorists. The Federation is strongly opposed to this approach, and will continue to lobby against it," says Ian Boyko, National Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students.

Danielle Sarazin, a spokesperson for Canada's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, confirms that some areas of study are prohibited for students from certain countries.

"It's not random. We work very closely with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Customs and Excise Canada," she said.

There has been a policy in Citizenship and Immigration since 1976 that bans the issuing of student visas to students from certain countries for certain subjects. Until recently, the policy has not been strictly enforced.

In the US, Senator Dianne Feinstein wants a temporary six-month moratorium on the granting of student visas. She says a number of the suspected hijackers in the September 11 attacks were enrolled at U.S. schools.

Sunera Thobani

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Northern Alliance in perpetuating human rights abuses and violence against women in the country.

If we listen to the voices of these women, we will very quickly be disabused of the notion that U.S. military intervention is going to lead to the emancipation of women in Afghanistan. Even before the bombings began, hundreds of thousands of Afghan women were compelled to flee their homes and communities, and to become refugees. The bombings of Kabul, Kandahar, Jalalabad and other cities in the country will result in further loss of life, including the lives of women and children. How on earth can we justify these bombings in the name of furthering women's emancipation?

My speech was made to rally the women's movement in Canada to oppose the war. Journalists and editors across the country have called me idiotic, foolish, stupid and just plain nutty. While a few journalists and columnists have attempted balanced coverage of my speech, too many sectors of the media have resorted to vicious personal attacks. Like others, I must express a concern that this passes for intelligent commentary in the mainstream media.

The subsequent harassment and intimidation which I have experienced ... confirm that the suppression of debate is more important to many supporters of the current frenzied war rhetoric than is the open discussion of policy and its effects. Fortunately, I have also received strong messages of support. Day by day the opposition to this unconscionable war is growing in Canada and all over the world.

Why I am going on strike

K-W: Ontario Coalition Against Poverty — November 2nd, 2001

Julian Ichim

On Friday November 2nd, many high school, college and university students will not attend classes. They will join workers, street youth and activists in a local demonstration which aims to topple the Tory government through economic disruption. People are meeting at **Kitchener City Hall at 10:00 a.m.** where there will be a rally and march through the economic districts of the city with the aim of hitting the Tories where it hurts — their pocket books.

This demonstration is part of a broader province-wide campaign of economic disruption initiated by the Toronto Ontario Coalition against Poverty (OCAP). People in Kitchener-Waterloo are participating in this campaign with the understanding that economic disruption can best be caused by mass actions such as student strikes, worker walkouts, and disciplined civil disobedience which does not physically harm the people of this city.

With the resignation of Mike Harris as Premier, many have thought that the battle against the policies of the provincial government, which puts profit over people, was over. This is not the case, since it was not Mike Harris the individual that implemented these hated policies. Rather, it was Mike Harris acting as a voice for the Conservative Party that implemented the attack on the poor and marginalized of our society. The change of leadership within the Conservative Party does not mean that the political orientation of the party will change.

Since their term in office began in 1995, welfare has been cut by 21.6 percent, and caseworkers have been encouraged to cut people off of welfare, resulting in mass poverty and homelessness. The Tory government also passed the "Safe Streets Act," which furthered the economic crisis by criminalizing squeegee street employment and "aggressive panhandling." They scrapped rent control and ended publicly funded housing, creating a crisis in this region due to the lack of affordable housing. Tuition at the University of Waterloo has increased from $1411 to $2238 for an arts degree, not to mention the 60-hour work week and other attacks on labour and the environment.

We all know the statistics and what Mike Harris has done on paper. Personally, I plan to not attend class on November 2 because I believe these statistics have a human face. As someone who volunteers at a youth drop-in centre, handles OCAP casework (which gets people back on social assistance and stops evictions), and is a poor youth who lives in the Cedar Hills community, the poorest area in K-W, I constantly come in contact with people who are directly affected by these policies.

In this world, there are two types of activists — those who give up their privilege and fight the good fight, and those who, because of economic necessity, are forced into struggle. On November 2nd, I am walking out because people are sleeping on the streets, forced into the underground economy because of lack of funds while our politicians' salaries continue growing.

Join the growing number of people who are saying "Enough." Let us join hands and build a just society with peace, sovereignty and dignity for all!

Contact K-W OCAP at (519) 220-2159.

It was not Mike Harris the individual that implemented these hated policies. Rather, it was Mike Harris acting as a voice for the Conservative Party that implemented the attack on the poor and marginalized of our society.

IMC Ontario space 'plugged-in' to news on October 16th

Julie Pong

As the Ontario Common Front protest started off at 5:00 a.m. on October 16, one could see anti-poverty, global justice, and First Nations activists, and many other individuals participating in the kickoff of the fall campaign against Mike Harris and the conservative government. Also on hand are reporters for the televisions in our living rooms, the newspapers at our front doors, and the online web sites — both mainstream and independent media.

The Ontario Independent Media Centre converged in a small room at 401 Richmond Street W in order to bring its audience instant news from the heart of the action. With their 12 temporary computers (some with the capacity to play audio), three televisions, a telephone, video equipment and a small surveillance camera, the Independent Media Centre (IMC) was equipped with many technologies needed to reach audiences with instantaneous news. The camera, set up to watch those people entering the corridor at Richmond, surprisingly picked up the occasional live feed from helicopters that hovered above the action.

This small group of 12 people, who began their adventure the night before, and who had been working on media coverage from the onset of this protest in the early hours of the morning, were well-organized in their design to bring up-to-the-minute accounts of the action in the downtown streets. Each member of the group had their own designated area of concern — from the stories

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A way forward — autonomy from corporations

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non-hierarchical network of free labour went off without a hitch. Everyone who wanted to go was able to, and everyone who went had a place to sleep.

On-site medical care was provided by the demonstrators' own medical teams. Individuals and affinity groups brought their skills and varying levels of medical training, making sure every march had at least one person sporting a red cross. Everyone knew that if they got hurt, they would receive medical care on the spot, no questions asked. If needed, more serious injuries would be taken care of, free of charge, by our 'socialist' Medicare system.

Groups similar to "Food Not Bombs" supplied food, taking food that would otherwise be thrown away by the criminally wasteful capitalist society, preparing it, and serving it free of charge to demonstrators and, on other days, the homeless.

The marches themselves were not top-down organized or a pre-planned exercise in conformity. Instead, groups of marchers made quick decisions by themselves, sometimes splitting up, sometimes joining larger marches, seemingly at a whim, but always to their advantage. None of the marches were trapped by the police, and more than 2,000 people eventually made their way into the financial core of downtown Toronto. The Police, with their rigid, authoritarian command structure, could not cope with the lightning-fast direction changes of the marchers, being forced to wait for orders from above with every new development.

Corporations supplied news coverage, to be sure, but only a trickle. The vast majority of pictures, videos and articles created that day were created by the demonstrators themselves, or by the Ontario Independent Media Centre (IMC). Up-to-the-minute news was phoned into the makeshift control centre, posted on the web, or instantly broadcast over the radio and streaming webcast. Pictures and videos were posted on the web only hours after the actions, the first few before the actions even finished.

Next, long in-depth articles began to appear, and most of these were not even written by the members of the IMC. That's because the IMC structure allows anyone to post anything they want, with no prior requirement but Internet access. People heartily demonstrated their willingness to be heard, and all told, more than 100 different people contributed to coverage of a three-hour event! Dozens of pages of detailed information, hundreds of pictures and several minutes of cleanly edited video are now freely available. A level of detail not even attempted by our authoritarian counterparts, who only trust themselves to interpret and create the news.

In the immediate aftermath of the demonstrations, the activists' legal network went into play, compiling information on those missing or arrested, and working to free those who had contact with the outside. These lawyers and law students donated their time and expertise free of charge, and will continue in the weeks and months ahead, supported by willing donations from other activists.

We are not only challenging the existing system. We are also demonstrating a possible way forward. As Noam Chomsky is fond of saying, "answers to [what a future society would look like] have to be learned by experiment." That is part of what we are doing — experimenting.

More on the Common Front campaign

For more information, visit the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty website, www.ocap.ca or the Ontario IMC's coverage, at the site ontario.indymedia.org/ocf

November 5 — Guelph
Info: 519-763-7138
5 am: Breakfast, Royal City Park
7 am: March on Gordon Street
Noon: Branion Plaza
2 pm - 6 pm: St. George's Square

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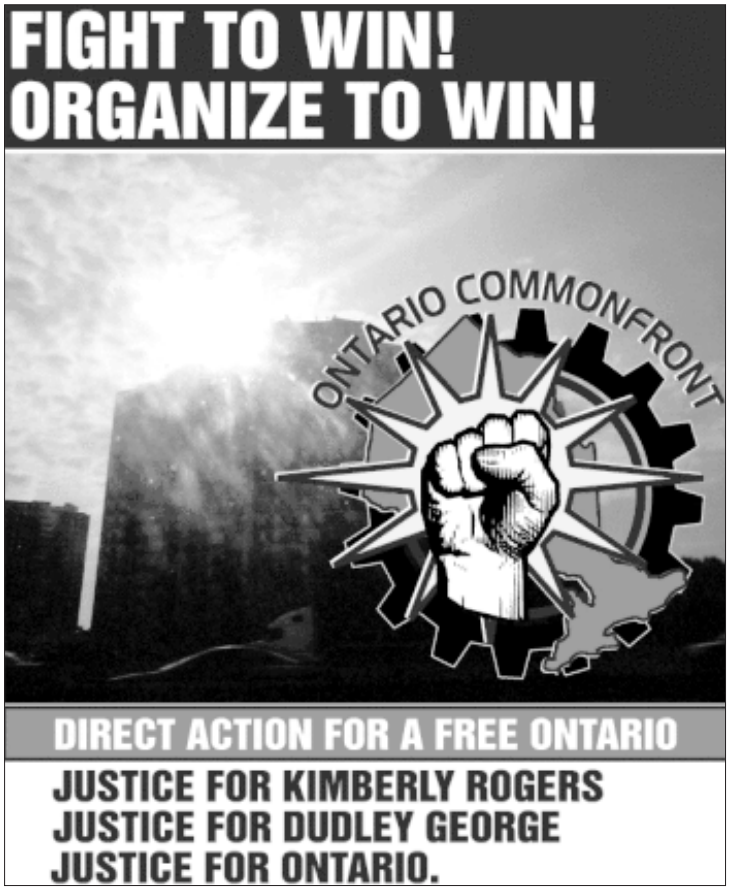
posted on the IMC website and the video feed from the streets that needed to be edited, to the people coming in off the street looking for information or assistance in reporting their own stories.

There were constant telephone calls from cell phones to update the IMC on the location of the protestors and other news from the streets. People who had just been in the snake march came to the IMC meeting spot and sat immediately at a computer to write about how they perceived the events on the streets. Runners from TVAC, the Toronto Video Activist Collective, brought footage from the streets, dropped off tapes and turned around to go back and record more of the Common Front battle.

Without a doubt, this group impressed me not only with the timeliness of their news, but also with the variety of media that were employed. In comparing the news on mainstream television with the accounts posted to the IMC website, one can see that at this event, the IMC made a conscious effort to give its audience the most accurate and reliable source of news that they could possibly generate.



Freedom of the press? Freedom from arbitrary search? I don't think so.

John Milton

This is a story about what happened to me as I attempted to cover the October 16th demonstrations in Toronto as an independent journalist.

I started the day at about 4:40 a.m., when I took a cab from the Independent Media Centre created for the event, to City Hall. My plan for the day was to start with some interviews during the breakfast gathering set to start at 5:00 a.m. Then, I would follow the march through the downtown and develop the story as events unfolded.

I had several camera bags and my media credentials clearly visible on a string around my neck. There were police everywhere, more than a hundred in the immediate vicinity of the square alone; but I heard the sound of drummers drifting down from the square in front of me, clearly audible over the noise of dozens of police radios.

As I left the sidewalk and entered the square, a cop stepped in front of me and took hold of my arm. "We are searching everyone's bags here — there's a zero tolerance policy in effect here today. I'm going to search your bag okay?". Knowing I was only required to submit to a police search if I was under arrest, and not particularly wanting anyone else rummaging through a bag of fragile and expensive camera equipment in the dark, I decided at this point I would decline. I asked the cop "Am I under arrest"? He answered "No". Before I had a chance to say anything further, he let go of my arm and grabbed one of my camera bags with both hands and tried to pull it off my shoulder. I grabbed the other side of the bag, looked him in the face and shouted, "No!"

"No? NO??!!" He responded, anger filling his voice, "You're under arrest!" I was seized by one of the other officers standing nearby, my bags were removed, and my hands cuffed behind my back. I was patted down, and my equipment spread out on the sidewalk. As I stood there passively, handcuffed and held by two large officers, I asked the third one examining my equipment to be careful with it. "You shut up! You're under arrest for disturbing the peace. You resist any more and we'll have to make you suffer some," was his response. After they finished their unproductive search, I was photographed with a Polaroid camera and then loaded, still handcuffed, into one of the metal cages inside a waiting van-style "paddy wagon."

Over the next half hour or so, the compartments of this vehicle were filled with 10 additional handcuffed individuals, all of whom told similar stories of arbitrary arrest without just cause.

What followed could be described as brutalization. For over five hours we were driven throughout the downtown core. We were all soaked in sweat, and all of the interior surfaces of the sheet metal cages were soon dripping with condensation. It was very hard to tell what was going on. It seemed that at times the truck was being used as part of a roadblock to prevent the march from going down certain streets. At other times, we were parked in front of large buildings, presumably as part of a "show of force" to deter unwanted activity.

When I was initially handcuffed, the cuffs had been put on very tightly. After about an hour in the truck I lost feeling and movement in my hands. After about two hours an intense burning pain began, starting in the hands and shooting up both forearms. At three and a half hours in restraints, my arms began to involuntarily convulse. Each contraction drove the cuffs into my swollen wrists. At this point I was screaming with each spasm.

Meanwhile, in one of the other cages another gentleman was having great difficulty of another sort. Having your arms pinned tightly behind you in various ways for extended periods interferes with the rib cages ability to move fully during breathing. It leads to slow suffocation. He was doubled over and slipping into unconsciousness as a result of this process. It was only at this point the officers responded to the ongoing pleas of the others to open the cages long enough to recuff the two of us with our arms in front of us. When this was done I could see the force of the cuffs against my wrists during the convulsions had crushed many of the small blood vessels, causing large blood-filled blisters to form under and around the cuffs.

After this, the driving continued for more than another hour and a half. Finally, we arrived at the 51 Division Police Station. We were processed, including a full strip search, and held in individual cells in the lockup from about 11:00 a.m. until about 10:30 p.m. We were all released without criminal charges being laid or any evidence of wrongdoing having been found. During this time we were all denied our right to contact legal representation. Some of my property was not returned to me, without legal excuse, at the time of my release. My efforts to retrieve it are ongoing.

My arrest: a medic's account

Jesse Bergman

My name is Jesse Bergman, and I was arrested in Toronto on October 16th.

My forty-minute chilling walk past several police cars ends on a sidewalk where I am arrested. Black plastic handcuffs subdue my alleged "Breach of Peace", and three Polaroid pictures document my criminalized face. I am the first of twelve packed into a police van. The van moves, but we are delayed by bizarre and unnecessary maneuvers, and endless waiting. Radio voices of police, while calm, betray their status as evidently lacking control.

My soul and voice anxiously relate compassion to support the hearts and bodies of my van friends (fellow arrestees). My songs and humour provide distraction from the numbness of our hands and arms. The metal wall becomes coated in streaking droplets of water and we watch them drain down with sinking spirits in the unbreathable heat of twelve humans in a tin.

My presence is requested by name from the van. My right to counsel is read only after I request it, and my right to clothing is stripped away as two men examine my clothes, my chest and my testicles. My prison is the 9th orange cell. The rusted water faucet mocks my dehydration and a lidless red eye watches all that I do. My speech is betrayed by the distorting echoes of my unchosen dungeon. My politeness is ignored beneath intimidation and accusation.

My medical skills are challenged to support another prisoner as they vomit unseen and unreachable. My mind flirts with despair and boredom and cold and anger and sorrow, while my will clings to music and prayer and intermittent humour and hope. My overdue release ends fourteen hours of injustice in an exuberant blast of emotional hugs. I am free at last, thank G_d almighty — free at last.

My website is: **www.student.math.uwaterloo.ca/~jbergman/o16/** Please visit it for a more detailed account of my ordeal.

*A complete version of Jesse's story is also available at article #2897 on **ontario.indymedia.org**, and of John's at article #2670*

Media Democracy Day

Brendan McLeod

Friday October19th was the first ever Media Democracy Day, aimed at informing the public about the commercialization and concentration of the mass media. To promote the event, the WPIRG activist group Media Watch held an open discussion with Dr. Herbert Pimlott, a communication studies professor at Wilfrid Laurier University.

The theme of Dr. Pimlott's talk was best summed up by his slogan: "The media must not solely be about choice, but about participation." Such a statement reflects Dr. Pimlott's view that since the airwaves belong to us, we should do more than simply read the newspaper and choose a viewpoint that the media has laid out. Instead, we must be active in the media's dissemination through our participation in alternative media groups, writing letters to the CRTC, and by educating ourselves on the blind spots present in mainstream media.

Throughout his talk, Dr. Pimlott stressed the importance of society's alternative voice, especially in times such as these when internal dissent is usually suppressed much more severely than in times of peace. While he shied away from using a propaganda model like that of Chomsky and Herman, Dr. Pimlott pointed out that the time constraints, and the corporations that own the media ensure that the news we see is often one-sided and biased. For the most part, the press relies on government press releases for its stories, and authority figures such as policemen, professors, and government officials for its viewpoints, making it less likely for alternative perspectives to be given airtime. Moreover, since the few corporations that own the mainstream media ultimately decide what makes the news, the voice counter to that of the elite is often suppressed. Consequently, Dr. Pimlott emphasized the need to "question everything" — not only the mass media, but alternative sources as well.

The ensuing discussion proved fairly lively, with a few participants noticeably appalled at some of the practices of the mainstream media. However, perhaps the most powerful impression was made by Dr. Pimlott's account of Port Hope, a small town that started its own daily when Conrad Black took over their newspaper. In general, most seemed to come away from the talk both inspired and empowered, with Dr. Pimlott urging all those present to help inform themselves and others.

Online media resources

AlterNet: www.alternet.org

Common Dreams: commondreams.org

Infoshop: www.infoshop.org

TAO Communications: toronto.tao.ca

Z Magazine: www.zmag.org

Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting: www.fair.org

Media Watch: wpirg.org/mediawatch

Media Channel: www.mediachannel.org

Campaign for Press & Broadcasting Freedom: www.presscampaign.ca

Oktoberfest means it's time to 'steal DA KEG'

Julian Ichim

On Friday October 5th, the K-W Youth Collective attempted to create a safe space for youth at city hall during the opening ceremonies of Oktoberfest, and protest the arbitrary banning of individuals from city hall property. Called "steal DA KEG," the KWYC aimed at stealing attention from the tapping of the keg and bringing attention to the issues of youth poverty and harassment.

This was part of the province-wide OCAP campaign for economic disruption. Oktoberfest is a Bavarian celebration which brings in many tourists from all over Canada. During this period, police and city officials attempt to "clean up the streets" by removing undesirable elements such as poor people and youth through arbitrary arrests and harassment, breaking up squats, and arresting panhandlers.

The K-W Youth Collective put forward the idea that young people should take over part of City Hall (outside) during this ceremony (which is taking place inside) to unmask the policies of the city.

The event began with security and police banning two members of the youth collective from City Hall property during the whole day without an explanation for why they were banned — contrary to rule of law and the presumption of innocence. The youth told security that they would remain on the sidewalk which is not city property.

Shortly after that, the security told protestors that they must remove the couches and props from city hall.

When the youth refused, about 30 police officers, security and emergency response unit members physically broke up the demonstration by physically removing the couches, some of which still had people on them. After that, they tried to throw the furniture in the garbage, because it was "blocking traffic". This was met by resistance from the youth, who were having a physical tug-of war with the police.

After the youth had saved the furniture from police, the demonstrators dispersed to come back later with their numbers depleted because of the violent scare tactics. Soon, the police told protestors that if they would not move they would be charged.

They arrested three protestors, and gave them tickets for trespassing. These scare tactics used by police to break up the demonstration are part of the continuing police campaign to attack the K-W Youth Collective and the drop-in centre that they run in Kitchener.

The K-W Youth Collective say that they will not be intimidated despite the constant police surveillance of the place and attempts by police to portray these youth as terrorists.

Media Democracy Day

October 19, 2001

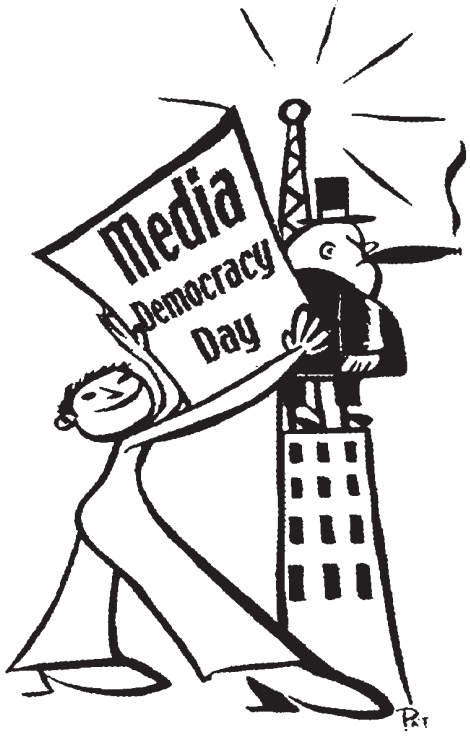
www.MediaDemocracyDay.org

In our era of rapid concentration and commercialization of the mass media, one major convergence remains: interest groups for media democracy.

Media Democracy Day will push for and promote a mass media system that informs and empowers all members of society. Media Democracy Day will connect existing pockets of critical and creative media projects into a coherent message for public attention and local and global actions.

Following the rise of social movements for feminism, racial justice, and environmentalism in recent decades, international efforts to democratize the media are now mobilizing for education, protest and change.

Media Democracy prioritizes diversity over multiplicity, citizen control over consumer choice, cultural development over commodity trading, community presentation over representation, and public discourse over public relations.



We want media reform

This citizens' agenda has been abandoned by government policy and conveniently sidestepped by mainstream media. Even though they use public airwaves and are supposed to mediate democratic discourse, media corporations face few public interest obligations.

Our print, broadcasting and even on-line media products and processes are unable to communicate the broad range of perspectives in our communities because they are addicted to advertising and mainly owned by a handful of national and international corporations. The only audiences these corporations are responsible to are their shareholders and major advertisers.

This movement calls for media reform and renewal not just for democracy, but for a communication system capable of expressing the transformative cultural changes needed for human survival through cooperation and ecological sustainability.

Protest

Against a media system based on commercialization and exclusiveness.

Educate

To understand how the media shapes our world, and limits democracy.

Change

Towards a media culture that encourages citizen participation and responds to public interests. Demand diversification of media control, equitable representation and community access.

Media Democracy Day in K-W

Media Watch, a WPIRG action group, hosted a discussion with WLU communication studies professor Herbert Pimlott <see page 7>. Also visit ontario.indymedia.org/blindspot for Blind Spot's special Media D-Day issue.

BlindSpot is made available at many locations throughout the K-W area. An effort is made to ensure copies are always available at: WPIRG (University of Waterloo Student Life Centre, 2nd Floor); The Working Centre (43 Queen St, Kitchener); Moody Blues Book Cafe (68 Regina St N, Waterloo); K W Bookstore (306 King St W, Kitchener); and Old Goat Books (99 King St N, Waterloo).

Activist Calendar

For more events, call our hotline at 658-8944, or visit http://pirg.uwaterloo.ca/calendar

EVERY FRIDAY, 5 - 6 PM
Peace Vigil
In front of Kitchener City Hall
Info: kwpeacevigil@yahoo.com

FRI. NOV. 2, 10 AM
K-W Students' Strike (all people welcome)
Meet at Kitchener City Hall — Info: 220-2159

FRI. NOV. 2, 7 PM
Free School talk by UW prof. Andrew Hunt
"The American Dream: The Hopeless Pursuit of Fame, Fortune, and Immortality"
The SPOT, 119-B King St. W, d-town Kitchener

SAT. NOV. 3, 11 AM - 4 PM
Peace and Compassion Day
Nathan Philips Square, Toronto
Info: Joel at 416-788-4176
or peaceandcompassionday@yahoo.com

MON. NOV 5, 6:30 - 9:00 PM
An Inquiry into the Health of Nature — FREE!
Featuring Elizabeth May & Nettie Wiebe
Waterloo Stage Theatre, 24 King St. N., Waterloo
Info: business@fes.uwaterloo.ca or 888-4882

FRI. NOV 9, RUSH HOUR (AM)
Protest Against Star Wars Research
Defence Research Establishment, Ottawa
Info and rides (leaving Nov. 8): 244-1140

MON. NOV 12, 9-4 PM
Quebec to Qatar Caravan: Raising awareness about the World Trade Organization.
Local K-W events are planned throughout the day — Info: narina@wpirg.org or 888-4882.

TUES. NOV 13, 7 PM
K-W Independent Media Centre meeting
43 Queen St. S., Downtown Kitchener
Info: 244-1140 or ontario@indymedia.org

WED. NOV 14, 7 PM
Movie: "Hidden Wars of Desert Storm"
A documentary on the terrible effects of the UN sanctions on the Iraqi people.
UW Davis Centre, room 1304

THURS. NOV 15, 7 PM
Amnesty International presents Richard Elliot
"Persecution of sexual minorities around the world." — UW SLC Multi-Purpose Room

SAT. NOV 17 - SUN. NOV 18
Protest Against G20 / IMF / World Bank
Ottawa — Info and rides: WPIRG at 888-4882

Please help keep this paper alive — pass it on when you're through with it. Thanks.